



Excellence and achievement defines a LawNet firm



Gardner Leader consistently exceeded targets in their ambitious development strategy”

Member profile



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The LawNet Law Firm of the Year award sets a challenging standard, one that reflects the LawNet ethos of quality and achievement against strategically-aligned goals. Gardner Leader secured the accolade in 2016 after consistently exceeding targets in their ambitious development strategy, which saw the firm's turnover double in five years, through a combination of organic growth, strategic alliances and acquisition.

Their strategy was based on three key themes, all of which resonate with the LawNet philosophy and are supported through the network's range of infrastructure services, enabling Gardner Leader to draw on relevant, purposed support during its fast-moving development:

- fostering a culture of excellent client service;
- creating sustainable long-term relationships; and
- investing in their people.

The firm has been a member of LawNet since 1993 and managing partner Derek Rodgers has served on the LawNet board since 2016.

Delivering by design



Derek Rodgers talks about what goes into making a top-performing, LawNet Law Firm of the Year

"Our achievements are part of a long-term vision, which has seen us achieve very significant growth over recent years. We have added new people, invested in new technology, implemented continuous improvement and change management processes, and integrated a couple of acquisitions into the firm to expand our geographical footprint. It's been a lot of hard work and we are very proud to have it recognised."

"As a firm, I think what is most important is that we all feel positive about coming to work every day, and, through that, ensure clients know that we are on their side and focused on achieving their objectives."

"The history of our strategic direction and resulting growth owes much to a LawNet training day on finance I joined shortly before becoming managing partner in 2011. I followed up the session by working directly with Wilkinson Read & Partners, LawNet's approved provider in this field, who revolutionised our thinking. Suddenly we could see that we could

be in the driving seat of mergers and acquisitions, not just be a 'victim' of it.

"We knew we had a very good firm, and all the partners aspired to achieve more, but it's often hard to imagine where you'll be in five years, or what will happen along the way. We found that by putting our ambitions on a trajectory, then asking ourselves what the firm would look like and what we would need to manage it properly at each given level, enabled us to work backwards and set out the steps to get there."

"Having done this planning, we found it had a much broader impact. For example, because we'd predicted that we'd need an HR specialist or a finance director at some future date, when an unexpected decision-making event occurred, we had the vision in place to say, 'OK, it makes sense to make that appointment now.' Without the underlying long-term strategy, the vision for such an appointment wouldn't exist at that point."

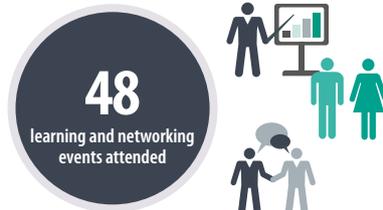
"Much of the value of being part of LawNet comes through being exposed to new ideas. Those may come from informal conversations with our peers in a non-competing environment, whether it's me using other managing partners as a sounding board, or junior fee earners getting to chat after a technical





UNDERTAKING THE AUDITS TO RETAIN THOSE STANDARDS KEEPS US ON OUR METTLE

HOW GARDNER LEADER USES LAWNET (usage over a 12 month period)



CPD session. The opportunity to speak openly and frankly is something that is hard to access outside a network such as this, and you know that any response will be honest and constructive.

“New ideas come also from the sort of speakers we get exposed to within LawNet, as they are of a level that we could never engage on our own. Recently that’s included Lucy Adams, former director of HR at the BBC, whose presentation at the LawNet conference prompted us to take a completely different approach to staff development and the appraisal process.

“Having decided upon the new direction, we then worked with Athena Professional, a LawNet-approved specialist supplier, who helped us turn it into reality by training staff in delivering the new programme. We know how vital it is that all our people are on-board and engaged, and in the last staff survey our employee engagement scores were at a very healthy 94%.

“Having access to knowledge and support such as this generates real added-value on LawNet membership, over and above any savings on the free CPD training, group purchasing and the professional indemnity scheme. While such benefits are more than enough to make membership worthwhile on their own, the results of being exposed to innovation play out across the firm.

“Five teams receiving technical skills development in ten practice areas is only the start; we also have staff taking part in training ranging from finance through to negotiation skills, as well as the annual conference which tackles leading edge topics.

How Gardner Leader makes use of free member services and discounted supplier arrangements



“Alongside, membership gives us access to benchmarking and practice management support that enables us to measure how we stand up against our peers, whether through the annual firm-wide benchmarking survey, the sector-wide benchmarked client satisfaction surveys, or the client service reviews and quality standard accreditation. Maintaining the LawNet ISO9001 standard and the Excellence Mark helps set the firm apart for clients, and undertaking the audits to retain those standards keeps us on our mettle.

“The past two years have seen an extraordinary rise in turnover, kickstarted by our litigation team doing some excellent work in heavyweight cases, which were bigger than might be expected in a firm of our size. As well as contributing to the bottom line, it enabled us to lift our sights and to raise aspirations across the firm, while making sure we retained our ethos and culture.

“To maintain a similar trajectory of turnover growth over the next few years will involve a further quantum leap, and part of that will come through our membership of LawNet. Their strategic direction in support and services helps us question our own direction, and this, combined with the learning we get from talking to other firms, helps us stay ahead of the curve.”

LawNet in 3 words





Derek Rodgers, Gardner Leader LLP

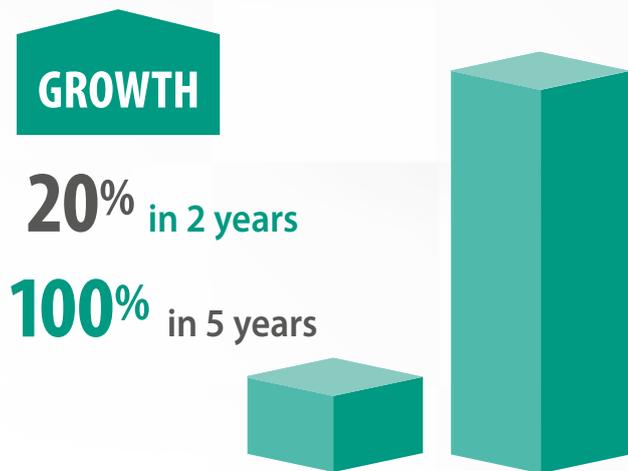
Gardner Leader is a 130-strong firm, generating over £7m turnover across its three offices in Berkshire.

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Recognised by the Legal 500 as a 'leading firm' with 'leading individuals', it has a reputation for heavyweight commercial litigation and has shown substantial growth across company and commercial departments, including commercial property and employment, and its private and family work over recent years.

Derek Rodgers joined Gardner Leader in 2005 as a partner in the firm's Corporate and Commercial team, becoming managing partner in 2011, since when he has been devoted to the firm's management and strategy on a full-time basis.

ABOUT GARDNER LEADER



125
staff across
3 offices



13
partners

Mix of work



24 ranked lawyers
2 leading individuals

13 'recommended' practice areas

Heavyweight **commercial litigation specialists**

